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Why do self-initiated expatriates quit their jobs: The role of job embeddedness and shocks in explaining turnover intentions

Abstract

Retaining self-initiated expatriates is a challenge for many organizations. Self-made expatriates tend to be mobile. They are willing to manage their own careers and to take up opportunities to live and work in countries of their own choice. Despite their importance as a source of human capital there are few studies on the work experiences of self-initiated expatriates and on the factors that affect their decisions to stay or leave their jobs. This article examined the effects of both job embeddedness and shocks on the turnover intention of self-initiated expatriates. Drawing on a sample of 204 self-initiated expatriates working in public healthcare organizations in the United Arab Emirates we found that both on-the-job embeddedness and shocks played a key role in predicting turnover intentions. The study also revealed that off-the-job embeddedness moderated the relationship between shock and turnover intentions such that self-initiated expatriates were more likely to consider leaving their organizations when they were firmly embedded in their community. We discuss the practical and theoretical implications of these findings.

Keywords: Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs); turnover intention; shocks; on-the-job embeddedness; off-the-job embeddedness.

1. Introduction

There are an increasing number of professionals who self-initiate their expatriation to take advantage of attractive opportunities offered internationally (Meyskens et al., 2009; Cerdin & Brewster, 2014). It is estimated that there are over 50 million expatriates worldwide many of whom initiate their expatriation (Finaccord, 2014). The global movement of talented and skilled professionals plays an important part in the economic development and international competitiveness of many countries (Silvanto & Ryan, 2014). Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) are a strategically valuable human resource for multinational corporations (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Tharenou, 2015). They often possess well-developed educational backgrounds, bring sought-after international work experience to their host organization and are highly motivated (Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Vaiman, Haslberger & Vance, 2015). However, self-initiated expatriates are not always easy to retain and tend to exhibit high levels of organizational turnover and to regularly switch jobs (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Bozionelos, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that shape the decisions of self-initiated expatriates to stay or leave their jobs. This is an important issue for many internationally-focused organizations because expatriate turnover can erode their economic performance, deplete their social capital and lead to a tarnished corporate reputation (Naumann, 1992; Shaw et al., 1998). Not only does turnover represent a loss of the special talents and skills that self-initiated expatriates bring to their host organizations but it also results in a range of personal and financial costs to the individuals involved (Cassiday, 2005; Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; McNulty, 2013; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). Attracting and retaining self-made expatriates is a vital human resource management task that

requires an understanding of both the factors that lead to turnover and the policies and practices that can be adopted to prevent the loss of this source of skilled labour.

Although research on self-initiated expatriates has provided important insights into the motivational factors for undertaking employment abroad (Thorn, 2009) and the challenges of cross-cultural adjustment (Froese, 2012; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009) there have been very few studies on the way in which the work experiences of self-initiated expatriates might affect organizational turnover. There has been research on the turnover intentions of company expatriates and on their repatriation (Kraimer, Shafeer, Harrison & Ren, 2012; Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerin & Taniguchi, 2009). However, organizational differences in the experiences of company and self-initiated expatriates would suggest that those who self-initiate may have greater difficulties in adjusting to their new jobs and to their host community than company expatriates (Biemann & Andresen, 2010). Self-initiated expatriates must draw almost exclusively on their own resources in order to live and work abroad (Andresen, Al Ariss & Walther, 2013; Bozionelos, 2009; Vance, 2005). They face greater financial obstacles which add to uncertainty and the risk of failure (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld & Dickmann, 2014). Self-initiated expatriates do not benefit from relocation allowances or company-related support in terms of housing or other forms of assistance that might enable them to better integrate into unfamiliar surroundings. They must adjust to a new job in a new organization and establish themselves in a different cultural environment within a foreign country (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). This can pose particular challenges to new arrivals who lack the sponsorship and help of organizations (Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

The aim of this paper is to help fill the gap in our understanding of self-initiated expatriate turnover by exploring organizational and community-related factors that either embed individuals in their jobs or alternatively cause them to reassess their employment in the context of their goals, plans and values. In a recent review of the extant literature Doherty, Richardson & Thorn (2013) pointed to the need to examine why self-initiated expatriates move organizations and to consider in particular the role of embeddedness in keeping people in their jobs. We seek to add value to the research on self-initiated expatriates by drawing on recent developments in turnover theory to explain the motivational forces that shape choices about whether to stay or to leave their job (Mitchell et al., 2001; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Lo et al., 2012). The research focuses on a study of health professionals in the United Arab Emirates. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness and turnover-related shocks in understanding why self-initiated expatriates remain or quit their jobs. Individuals who are embedded in both their job and in their community are expected to stay longer in their host location and display a greater preference for organizational stability (Biemann & Andresen 2010; Cerdin & Pargneux 2010; Doherty, Dickmann & Mills, 2011; Vaiman et al. 2015).

In the following section we outline our theoretical framework and hypotheses drawing in particular on contemporary turnover theories relating to job embeddedness and shocks. We explain the relevance of these constructs to the possible turnover intentions of self-initiated expatriates. The paper then provides information on the research setting, the sample and the measures used in the study. Finally, we explore the empirical results and discuss the significance of the findings and how they add to a better understanding of the turnover of self-initiated expatriates.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Early models of turnover were grounded in March and Simon's (1958) theory that quitting derived from decisions about the perceived desirability and ease of movement. Most of this research focused on the role of attitudinal factors such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment in explaining employee exit behavior (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Mobley, 1977; Price, 1977; Steers & Mowday, 1981). Although work attitudes were found to be related to turnover there was evidence that they only played a modest explanatory role (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000). This led to a focus on turnover theories which placed a greater emphasis on wider organizational factors and non-work influences. Lee, Mitchell and colleagues (1994; 1999) identified the importance of 'shocks' or 'jarring events' as reasons why people chose to leave their jobs. They found that shocks (such as being overlooked for promotion or receiving a negative and unexpected performance evaluation) could cause employees to reassess the quality of their attachment to the organization and lead them to quit.

Building upon this work Mitchell et al. (2001), Lee et al. (2004) and Felps et al. (2009) developed the concept of job embeddedness, which they described as a web of forces that helped to constrain people from leaving their jobs. Individuals could be viewed as building attachments both on-the-job to the organization in which they worked and off-the-job to the community in which they lived that made them less likely to leave their job. Because of the importance of contextual influences on expatriate mobility the concepts of embeddedness and shocks are highly relevant to understanding why individuals may decide to stay or leave their organization (Ren et al., 2014). Studies by Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) and Kraimer et al. (2012) have provided rich evidence on the role of job embeddedness and shocks to decisions on repatriation. Moreover, a range of studies have demonstrated that job embeddedness can

explain turnover over and above that accounted for by job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Crossley et al., 2007; Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2004; Mallol et al., 2007). Consequently we have sought to test both embeddedness and shocks as factors affecting the turnover decisions of self-initiated expatriates.

According to the job embeddedness theory, employee turnover will be affected by two factors: on-the job embeddedness which ‘refers to how enmeshed a person is in the organization where he or she works’, and off-the job embeddedness which ‘relates to how entrenched a person is in his or her community’ (Crossley et al., 2007, p. 1031). Each of these forms of embeddedness is built on (a) the links that an employee has to other people or the community (b) the extent to which an employee fits into their organization or environment and (c) the sacrifice or perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be lost by leaving a job (Mitchell et al., 2001). Job embeddedness thus results from forces both within the organization and in the community.

Self-initiated expatriates can become embedded in their organization where there is a fit between their career goals and the professional development opportunities that are provided by the organization (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). It has been noted that self-initiated expatriates are solely responsible for setting their career goals (Al Ariss, Koall, Ozbilgin & Suutari, 2012). Thus the greater the perceived compatibility between the goals and values of the individual and the larger corporate culture, and the requirements of the job the higher the likelihood that an individual will feel attached to the organization (Kraimer et al., 2012). Perceptions of successful career progression while working abroad have been found to be associated with positive emotions and pride (Andresen et al., 2014). Links between the employee and their co-workers also can affect the decision to stay (Holtom et al., 2008).

Interpersonal relationships have been shown to be a particularly important source of satisfaction for self-initiated expatriates (Bozionelos, 2009). Finally, sacrifices or personal losses in terms of leaving interesting projects or giving up valuable perks or benefits can also make quitting more difficult. In this context, we expect that on-the-job embeddedness will be negatively related to turnover intention after controlling for job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment and job security:

H1: On-the-job embeddedness will be negatively related to self-initiated expatriates' turnover intentions after controlling for job satisfaction, affective commitment, and job security.

Off-the-job embeddedness is also seen as an important factor affecting turnover particularly in cases where employees are required to change locations (Holtom & O'Neil, 2004). Expatriates can face a range of cross-cultural adjustment problems (McDonnell & Scullion, 2013; Takeuchi, 2010). However, where employees develop social ties and links within their host country they are more likely to become embedded in their community and be able to draw on those resources to deal with the every-day stresses of daily life (Adelman, 1988). They can gain a better understanding of both the organization and the host country in which they live (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman & Bournois, 2013). Familiarity and comfort with the different aspects of the new environment can reduce uncertainty and assist job retention (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Developing formal or informal connections with people in the host country helps to enmesh expatriates into the community in which they reside and to stabilize their ties to the organization. Social networks allow expatriates to better connect and relate with others thereby supporting their adjustment (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2016). Breaking the links and sacrificing the community networks in which they live can therefore raise the perceived costs of changing jobs (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Farh et al., 2010; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). There is evidence that the more an employee has to give up in terms of

leaving their job or their community the more difficult it is to quit (Shaw et al., 1998). Therefore, we would expect that off-the-job embeddedness would be negatively related to turnover intention after controlling for job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment and job security.

H2: Off-the-job embeddedness will be negatively related to self-initiated expatriates' turnover intentions after controlling for job satisfaction, affective commitment, and job security.

Lee and Mitchell (1994) argue that shocks or specific jarring events may initiate thoughts of quitting. Shocks are said to be distinguishable events that lead employees to reassess their job in the context of their values and goals and which can lead them to voluntarily quit their job. Shocks may be expected or unexpected, positive or negative, and internal or external to the individual (Lee et al., 1999). They may lead an employee to quit immediately, or cause them to conduct a job search. Family and friends in the home country can be a source of jarring events and initiate thoughts of quitting (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Self-initiated expatriates face a high degree of uncertainty while working abroad (Dickmann, Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Tanskanen & Tornikoski, 2017). Death or illness of a family member may trigger a reassessment of life in the host country and a judgement about whether the employment situation is meeting their plans or goals. A pregnancy may initiate thoughts of repatriation because of a previously determined plan to bring up children in the home country or a desire to raise a child close to family (Inkson et al., 2004). Employees can also receive organizational shocks which may lead to a reappraisal of the quality of their attachment to the job. An individual may unexpectedly be bypassed for promotion or receive a surprisingly negative performance appraisal which can result in a concern that their career opportunities

are being hampered and that they should no longer stay with the organization. We therefore expect that shocks will be positively related to turnover intention, after controlling for job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, job security, on-the-job embeddedness, and off-the-job embeddedness.

H3: Shocks will be positively related to self-initiated expatriates' turnover intentions after controlling for job satisfaction, affective commitment, job security, on-the-job embeddedness and off-the-job embeddedness,

The effects of shocks on the turnover intentions of self-initiated expatriates could be affected by job embeddedness. High levels of embeddedness could make employees more sensitive to shocks and strengthen the effects on turnover intention (Mitchell et al., 2001). This may particularly be the case with off-the-job embeddedness where more extensive roots into the community can provide individuals with greater access to information about other jobs and encourage employees to respond to a shock by searching for alternatives. Ramesh and Gelfand (2010), for example, found that greater community links were associated with a higher probability of turnover which was consistent with the suggestion that people with strong off-the-job links were likely to be 'well networked' and possess a better knowledge about other positions. Thus off-the-job 'stuckness' may increase the likelihood that an organizationally-induced shock could lead to a higher intention to quit (Holtom et al., 2005). It has been widely observed that self-initiated expatriates demonstrate a greater ability than comparable company expatriates to adapt to the host country, to interact with the local community and to learn the language (Dickmann et al., 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Therefore we would expect that off-the-job embeddedness would strengthen the relationship between shocks and turnover intention.

H4: Off-the-Job embeddedness moderates the relationship between shocks and turnover intention such that the relationship is stronger when off-the-job embeddedness is high.

The hypothesized model is presented in Figure 1

[Figure 1 about here]

3. Research setting and sample

The research was conducted in the United Arab Emirates. This country hosts the second largest number of expatriates in the world with over 88 per cent of the population made up of expatriates (Finaccord, 2014; Snoj, 2015). A multi-item survey was distributed to a random sample of 700 doctors, nurses, administrators, and other clinical staff in two public hospitals in Abu Dhabi. The employees were provided with a questionnaire as well as information on the purpose of the study and were asked to place the questionnaire in a sealed envelope in a locked box located in a common area in the hospital. A total of 261 completed surveys were returned representing a 37% response rate. Of those surveys 204 were completed by self-initiated expatriates. Respondents comprised nationalities from a diverse range of countries including India, the Philippines, the UK, Pakistan, Canada and the USA. The average age was 38.30 years ($SD= 9.42$); the gender distribution was strongly female (76%) and the main occupational groups were nurses (49%), administrators (26%) and doctors (12%). There were also smaller numbers of pharmacists, lab technicians and radiographers in the sample.

Measures

All data with the exception of the demographic characteristics, were collected using a five-point Likert type scale (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree). The reliabilities for the multi-item scales are shown along the diagonal in Table 1.

Dependent Variable:

Intention to Quit was measured by three items: “I plan to leave this hospital as soon as possible”; “I would be reluctant (unwilling) to leave this hospital” (R) and “I often think about leaving this hospital” (Price, 2001; Kim et al., 1996). Turnover intention is defined as: ‘the (subjective) probability that an individual will change his or her job within a certain period of time’ (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2002, p. 1).

Independent Variables:

Job satisfaction was measured using a three item scale and included questions such as: “I find real enjoyment with my job” and “I am fairly well satisfied with my job” (Price, 2001; Kim et al., 1996). *Affective organizational commitment* was measured using a four-item scale from Allen & Meyer, (1990) and included: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” and “I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization” (R). *Job security* was assessed using 6 items adopted from De Witte’s (2000) job insecurity inventory including: “I think that I will be able to continue working in this hospital”; “There is only a small chance that I will become unemployed” and “I am very sure that I will be able to keep my job”.

On-the job embeddedness utilized nine items from Felps et al. (2009) and consisted of a combination of three sub-scales: On-the-job fit was measured using three items which included: “My job utilizes my skills and talents well” and “I feel like I’m a good match for

my organization”. On-the-job links utilized three items and included: “I am a member of an effective work group” and “I work closely with my coworkers”. On-the-job sacrifice was measured using three-items. Examples were: “I have a lot of freedom in this job to pursue my goals” and “I would sacrifice (give up) a lot if I left this job”.

Off-the job embeddedness drew on nine items from Felps et al. (2009) consisting of three subscales: Off-the-job fit was assessed by three items including: “The place where I live is a good match for me” and “The area where I live offers the leisure activities that I like (sports, outdoor activities, cultural events and arts)”. Off-the-job links was captured by three items such as: “My family roots are in this community” and “I am active in one or more community organizations (e.g., mosques, churches, sports teams, schools, etc.)”. Off-the-job sacrifice was a three-item scale which included: “Leaving the community where I live would be very hard” and “If I were to leave the area where I live, I would miss my neighborhood”.

Shock was measured using a three-item scale adopted from Lee et al. (1999): “There is a single particular personal event that is causing me to think about quitting”; “There is a single particular work related event that is causing me to think about quitting”; and “There are series of events that are causing me to think about quitting”.

In our analysis we controlled for the effects of the following variables: Age, gender, occupation, tenure, and site. The control variables were measured as: age (in years), gender (male = 1, female = 2), occupation (administrator = 1, doctor = 2, nurse = 3, other = 4), tenure (years of service with the organization), site (hospital 1 = 1, hospital 2 = 2).

4. Results

The descriptive statistics along with the correlations are reported in Table 1. Turnover intention was negatively and significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -0.48$, $p < .01$), affective organizational commitment ($r = -0.52$, $p < .01$), on-the-job embeddedness ($r = -0.52$, $p < .01$), off-the-job embeddedness ($r = -0.20$, $p < .01$) and job security ($r = -0.24$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, turnover intention was positively and correlated with shock ($r = 0.50$, $p < .01$).

[Table 1 about here]

The first four hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2). In the first step the control variables (age, gender, marital status, tenure, site and occupation) were included in addition to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job security. In the second step, both on-the-job embeddedness and off-the-job embeddedness were added to the model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03$). It can be seen that on-the-job embeddedness had a negative effect on the turnover intention of self-initiated expatriates ($\beta = -0.41$; $p < 0.01$) which confirmed Hypothesis 1. On the other hand, off-the-job embeddedness did not affect the turnover intention of self-initiated expatriates, thus, rejecting Hypothesis 2.

In the third step, shock was included. After controlling for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job security, and both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness, shock accounted for a significant amount of the variance in turnover intention ($\Delta R^2 = 0.08$). Shock had a positive effect on turnover intention ($\beta = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$), which provided support for Hypothesis 3.

The fourth step of the hierarchical regression tested for hypothesis 4. To avoid high multicollinearity with the interaction term, the variables were centred and an interaction term

between shock and off-the-job embeddedness was created (Aiken, West & Reno, 1991). The interaction term between shock and off-the-job embeddedness added significantly to explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02$). This provided support for Hypothesis 4 as off-the-job embeddedness positively moderated the relationship between shocks and turnover intention. Thus the interaction of shock and high off-the job embeddedness was associated with higher turnover intention.

[Table 2 about here]

We graphed the interaction following the procedures outlined by Aiken, West and Reno (1991). In Figure 2 it can be seen that that shock had a positive effect on turnover intention ($\beta = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$). This effect increased with high values of off-the-job embeddedness ($\beta = 0.43$; $p < 0.01$), and was less marked with low values of off-the- job embeddedness (0.17 ; $p < 0.05$)

[Figure 2 about here]

5. Discussion

Self-initiated expatriates form a large segment of the international employment pool (Vaiman et al., 2015). It is widely recognized that they differ from traditional company-assigned expatriates in various ways including their desire and ability to move to from one country to another (Doherty et al., 2011) and their lower commitment to the organizations with which they work (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013). This willingness and tendency to be on the move can

make organizational retention more challenging. Expatriate failure in terms of turnover is costly for both the individual and the organization (Birdseye & Hill, 1995; Bhuian, & Al-Jabri, 1996). The purpose of our research is to understand the role of job embeddedness and shocks in affecting the turnover intentions of self-initiated expatriates. Different studies have produced different findings on embeddedness. Some have pointed to the importance of off-the-job embeddedness in shaping turnover decisions (Lee et al., 2004) while others have identified on-the-job embeddedness as the principal explanation for variations in turnover beyond job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Mallol, Holtom, & Lee, 2007). Moreover, there is little knowledge of how embeddedness might interact with shocks to affect the turnover intentions of employees living and working abroad.

This study has advanced our understanding of self-initiated expatriates by providing an integrated framework that explains how different forms of embeddedness and shocks affect turnover decisions. Our first contribution lies in our finding that on-the-job rather than off-the-job embeddedness was associated with lower turnover intentions. The result is similar to that of Mallol et al. (2007) whose study of (Hispanic) immigrants also revealed that on-the-job embeddedness was predictive of turnover whereas off-the-job embeddedness was non-significant. It has been suggested that off-the-job embeddedness may be less likely to shape turnover among employees who are not native to the communities in which they work. In cases such as this links to the organization in the form of stable jobs and relationships with co-workers may make quitting more difficult than links to networks that are loosely formed and perhaps less well established in the wider community (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010).

This is consistent with the context within which our study is located. Self-initiated expatriates come to the United Arab Emirates seeking good economic opportunities and high

paying jobs (Alnajjar, 1996; Randeree, 2009). Attractive remuneration packages tend to ensure a good fit with the individual's personal values and career goals and plans (Jackson et al., 2005; Richardson & McKenna, 2006). Most organizations in the UAE use English as the main language of communication and follow widely-accepted international standards which can provide expatriates with a further reason for good fit. There is also evidence that interpersonal ties and co-worker relationships can act as an important source of job satisfaction and assist with organizational retention (Bozionelos, 2009).

Off-the-job embeddedness was not related to turnover intentions. This may be explained by the fact that expatriates do not rely heavily on local social structures in their community (Ren et al., 2014). Consequently, their sense loss in severing their ties with that community will be less as will be the psychological and material costs associated with job mobility. Self-initiated expatriates change employers and sectors frequently and tend not to build up strong peer networks (Dickmann et al., 2017). They have been noted for their desire for adventure and exploration (Doherty et al., 2011; Inkson et al., 1997) and their ability to master the challenges of living and working in difference cultural environments (Vaiman et al. 2015). This could reduce their sensitivity to off-the-job embeddedness.

The second contribution of our study lies in a better understanding of the role of shocks in shaping turnover intentions. Earlier research in the US had established the importance of shocks in affecting the turnover decisions of accountants (Lee et al., 1999). Self-initiated expatriates can experience a range of shocks as they adapt to the new environment of a job in a country with foreign managers and co-workers. In these circumstances the likelihood of misunderstandings and shocks can be high (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). A shock may be triggered by an unexpected poor appraisal, a salary increase that the expatriate does not share

in or a promised promotion that is denied (Burton et al., 2010). Another type of shock that may be experienced by an expatriate is an illness of a family member which may necessitate leaving the organization and returning home (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

Shocks also interacted with off-the-job embeddedness to affect turnover intentions. When self-initiated expatriates were firmly embedded in their community shocks were more likely to precipitate mobility. This may be due to a number of factors. First, off-the-job embeddedness may make individuals feel more confident and better placed to get a job elsewhere within the local labour market. Greater access to information about other jobs may encourage self-initiated expatriates to respond to a shock by actively searching for other positions. Second, off-the-job embeddedness may affect the meaning and importance of a shock. It has been argued that an employee's interpretation of a shock will be affected by their social context and by the links with other people with similar interests and values in the community (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006). These help frame individual tendencies for risk-taking when facing turnover-related decisions (Vardaman et al., 2008). Self-initiated expatriates tend to have good networks and relationships with other people who work abroad and who are not averse to taking risks in seeking new jobs and looking for new life experiences (Doherty et al., 2011; Peltokorpi 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese 2009). These links can make self-initiated expatriates more willing to look for other jobs in reaction to a shock.

The practical implications that can be drawn from the findings of this study include suggested strategies that could help organizations retain their self-initiated expatriates. It is clear that on-the job embeddedness can assist retention. Organizations can enhance job embeddedness in a number of ways: fit can be increased by matching employees' skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes with job requirements, links can be increased through participation in longer-

term projects and the nurturing of teams and work groups (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2004) and sacrifices can be increased by connecting organizational and job rewards to the length of tenure and by offering career development initiatives (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

Managers can also design ways to identify potential shocks and respond to them appropriately. Many shocks are said to be organizational in nature and systems can be put into place to respond to them and reduce the likelihood of turnover (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006). It has been suggested that regular employee attitude surveys, active mentoring and feedback programs can help to anticipate shocks and minimize their effect on departures (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). On the other hand, organizational efforts to cultivate community embeddedness by improving off-the-job links would not appear to be a particularly fruitful course of action. As we noted earlier off-the-job embeddedness strengthened the effect of shocks on turnover intention. Managers would be better advised to foster on-the-job embeddedness by building social and other activities which could enmesh the expatriate and his/her family in the organizational rather than the community web (Mallol et al., 2007).

6. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the research was cross-sectional in design and the data were collected from a single source. This could give rise to a problem of common method variance. We sought to address this issue by applying Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results indicated that common method variance was not a problem and did not distort the identified relationships found in the study. However, future research would benefit from using multiple sources of data collected at different points in

time which could also assist in making causal inferences about the relationships (Finkel, 1995).

Second, the study focused on turnover intentions. As we were required to guarantee the anonymity of our respondents we could not match them to archival turnover data. This is not an uncommon problem with research on expatriate turnover (see Bozionelos, 2009; Lo et al., 2012). It should be noted, however, that turnover intentions are considered to be the single best predictor of actual turnover and in a number of studies there is a high explained variance (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Vardaman et al., 2008). Nevertheless, future research should seek to obtain data on the actual turnover of self-initiated expatriates and investigate how turnover intentions actually lead to subsequent quitting behavior (Hom et al., 2012). This could involve an examination of the effect of alternative job opportunities and the process of job search (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009).

7. Conclusion

Self-initiated expatriates represent an important source of human capital for business organizations across the world. As employees they tend to possess rich educational backgrounds, sought-after global competencies and strong career motivations. The financial costs associated with their recruitment, hiring and training as well as the productivity losses involved in replacing them can be high. It is widely acknowledged that self-initiated expatriates are not always easy to retain. They tend to have high organizational mobility preferences and low levels of commitment. Our study focused on the importance of embeddedness and shocks in identifying why self-initiated expatriates choose to stay or leave their host organization. There has been little research on how these factors affect the turnover decisions of these highly mobile international workers. The research revealed that both on-the

job embeddedness and shocks played a key part in shaping turnover intentions. Furthermore, the effect of shocks on turnover intentions was more powerful when employees were embedded in their local communities. These findings help shed additional light on the factors that affect the turnover decisions of self-initiated expatriates. They demonstrate the unique effects of the two dimensions of job embeddedness as well as the role of shocks in explaining why employees choose to quit their jobs.

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TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations^a

Variables	Items	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Turnover intention	3	2.80	.90	(.80)												
2. Job satisfaction	3	3.79	.69	-.48	(.81)											
3. Affective commitment	4	3.29	.68	-.52	.49	(.62)										
4. Job security	6	3.47	.67	-.24	.22	.26	(.73)									
5. On-job-embeddedness	9	3.62	.54	-.52	.51	.53	.21	(.82)								
6. Off-job-embeddedness	9	3.27	.77	-.20	.11	.30	.11	.47	(.70)							
7. Shock	3	2.87	.98	.50	-.28	-.34	-.27	-.31	.02	(.76)						
8. Age	1	38.30	9.42	.02	.01	.01	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.03	--					
9. Female	1	.76	.43	.10	-.15	.01	.02	-.17	-.03	.07	-.01	--				
10. Married	1	.73	.45	-.08	.10	.12	.08	.19	.14	-.01	.29	.04	--			
11. Tenure	1	5.97	4.90	.06	.03	.05	-.11	.04	.19	.10	.50	.02	.21	--		
12. Administrator	1	.26	.44	-.15	.23	.19	-.02	.24	-.13	-.11	-.27	-.41	-.12	-.02	--	
13. Doctor	1	.12	.32	.04	-.05	.02	.01	-.05	.00	.01	.22	-.18	.02	-.09	-.22	--
14. Nurse	1	.49	.50	.23	-.19	-.10	.04	-.17	-.19	.06	.13	.43	.15	.07	-.57	.36

^a*n* = 204; reliabilities are reported along the diagonal. Correlations above [.14] are significant at *p* < .05, two-tailed test.

TABLE 2
Hierarchical Regression Results

Variables	Turnover Intention			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
<i>Controls</i>				
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Gender (female)	.16 (.15)	.10 (.15)	.08 (.14)	.06 (.14)
Marital Status	-.10 (.13)	-.06 (.13)	-.08 (.12)	-.07 (.12)
Tenure	.03 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)
Site (Hospital 1)	.03 (.13)	-.02 (.12)	.09 (.12)	.10 (.11)
Occupation (administrators)	.34 (.20)	.38 (.20)	.35 (.18)	.33 (.18)
Occupation (doctors)	.54 (.23)*	.53 (.23)*	.42 (.21)	.43 (.21)*
Occupation (nurses)	.47 (.18)**	.48 (.18)**	.42 (.16)*	.44 (.16)**
Job Satisfaction	-.34 (.09)**	-.26 (.10)**	-.21 (.10)*	-.22 (.09)*
Organisational Commitment	-.49 (.10)**	-.41 (.10)**	-.35 (.10)**	-.33 (.10)**
Job Security	-.15 (.08)	-.12 (.08)	-.05 (.08)	-.05 (.08)
On-the-job Embeddedness		-.41 (.15)**	-.29 (.14)*	-.25 (.14)*
Off-the-job Embeddedness		.08 (.09)	.04 (.08)	-.01 (.08)
Shock			.30 (.06)**	.29 (.06)**
<i>Interaction</i>				
Shock x Off-the-Job Embeddedness				.17 (.07)*
<i>F</i>	10.89**	10.18**	13.13**	13.06**
ΔF	10.89**	4.02*	28.33**	6.14*
<i>R</i> ²	.43	.46	.54	.56
ΔR ²	.43	.03	.08	.02
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.39	.41	.50	.52

n= 204; unstandardised regression coefficients are reported; standard error in parentheses.
* p < .05; ** p < .01 (two-tailed test).

FIGURE 1

Effect of embeddedness and shock on SIEs turnover intention

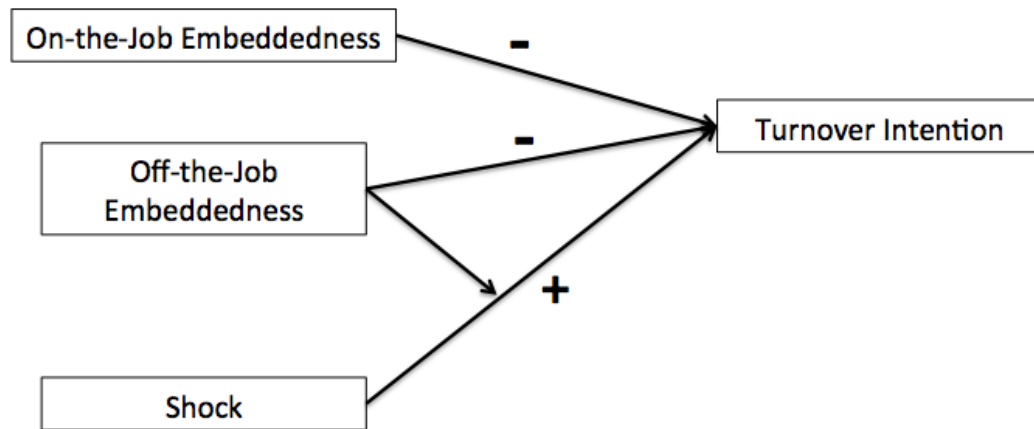


FIGURE 2

Moderation effect of off-the-job embeddedness on the relationship between shock and turnover intention

